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INFORMATION REPORT

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COUNTRY Siam/Indochina

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SUBJECT The Khmer-Issarak Movement

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SUPPLEMENT TO  
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Comment. This report modifies and clarifies Paragraph 3 of [REDACTED] which stated that Nai Khuang Abhaiwong was the leader and supreme commander in chief of the Khmer-Issaraks. This statement was graded [REDACTED]

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1. Nai Khuang Abhaiwong commands great popularity and respect in Cambodia because of his family and personal background, and because of his own personality. Almost all of the various groups which comprise the Khmer-Issarak movement or adhere to it claim to be associated with Nai Khuang and to be led by him. However, most of these groups are made up of opportunistic profit-seekers without serious political intentions, or mere bandits. Nai Khuang is well aware of this and regards most of these groups with either good-natured contempt or downright dislike. He completely disapproves of their venal banditry and he thinks they are all "for sale". He is reported to have said jokingly to the French Minister in Bangkok: "If you are worried about the Khmer-Issaraks, why don't you buy them off? It would not be very expensive". From a political point of view, Nai Khuang feels that the present deployment of activities against the French in Cambodia is merely playing into the hands of the Viet Minh. He knows that the Viet Minh movement is a deadly serious one and considers it much more of a danger to Cambodia and Siam than he does the French.

2. The two most prominent self-advertised leaders of the Khmer-Issaraks in Bangkok are Phra Phiset Phanit, Nai Khuang's brother-in-law, and Nai Yawalit Abhaiwong, Nai Khuang's nephew. Nai Khuang regards them as unscrupulous, incompetent and foolish and gives them no encouragement.

3. Phra Phiset is stupid and unpopular and has no real influence. He probably controls only two or three small bands of Issaraks in Cambodia but likes to advertise himself as a great leader. Despite his family connection with Nai Khuang, he is a follower of Pridi and if he has any importance at all, it lies in his relationship with the Pridi group [REDACTED]

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## 4. Phra Phiset's principal subordinates are:

- a. Nai Sun, who is an intimate friend of Tran Van Giau and maintains liaison with him for Phra Phiset;
- b. Nai Tok, who is wealthy;
- c. Nai Hool, who stole a French automobile in Cambodia, smuggled it into Siam, and was arrested for this theft by the Siamese authorities under French pressure. Nai Hool was subsequently released because of "lack of evidence" (sic).

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Comment. Nai Hool is undoubtedly Colonel Houl Wongsearnubap who was reported in the Bangkok press on 15 September 1947 as Prime Minister and Minister of Finance in the Free Cambodian government set up in Cambodian-occupied parts of Siem Reap and Battambang. Colonel Houl was reported as having been deputy field commander of the Cambodian armed forces in Indochina. On 24 April 1948, Agence France Presse reported that Houl had been arrested in Bangkok on 21 April following his illegal sale of a motor car stolen from a French convoy in Indochina. He was reported as having taken refuge in Siam when the bulk of his troops was defeated "after Siam had to give back Battambang and Siem Reap". On 27 April 1948, Phra Phiset wrote a letter to Liberty, saying that the Free Cambodians did not support Houl and that he was not related to their movement.)

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## 5. In late March 1948, Phra Phiset, "on behalf of the Khmer-Issarak", and Le Hi, on behalf of the Viet Nam government, signed a "treaty" of mutual help. It provided for the "cooperation between the Khmer-Issarak Army and the Army of the Viet Nam Republic", and its terms were rather vague.

6. The principal importance of the Khmer-Issarak to the Viet Minh lies less in the movement's military potential than in its ability and willingness to aid the Viet Minh in maintaining liaison between Cochinchina and Siam, for the passage of arms, troops, agents, couriers and political leaders. Comment. which describes the movements of Tran Van Giau across the Cambodian-Siamese frontier under the protection of the Khmer-Issarak.)

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7. About the beginning of April 1948, Viet Minh leaders or advisers were attached to various Khmer-Issarak units, with a resulting improvement in their efficiency. Comment. It has not been determined whether the attachment of these leaders or advisers (i.e. Can Ro) was the result of the accord (which the Viet Minh claims it was) or mere coincidence.)

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## 8. Phra Phiset has come somewhat under the aegis of Luang Pibul, and was instructed by him to sign the "treaty" with Le Hi as a measure that would facilitate Siamese government espionage in Battambang. Le Hi, thinking the move would be a good propaganda stunt, "swallowed the bait".

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Comment by Le Hi apparently thinks well of Phra Phiset and may partly control him (see Comment). In private conversation, Le Hi has stated that Phiset is a "good man". Among the Viet Minh in Bangkok, it has been reported, it is a fairly open secret that Phra Phiset, who is now short of funds, is being financed by the Viet Nam News Service. However, Le Hi has stated privately that these payments are returns of advances previously made by Phiset in his prosperous days. Nevertheless, it seems probable that the "treaty" was a genuine one and that Phiset's principal collaboration is with the Viet Minh and the left wing of the Free Thai. Phiset's liaison with Tran Van Giau (paragraph 4), if this report is validated, supports this view.)

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9. Nai Yavalit Abhaiwong's interest in the Khmer-Issarak is a personal one, as, like his uncle, he owns considerable property in Battambang. His principal follower is one Colonel Riey (spelling uncertain) Comment.

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10. Another important person in Bangkok who was connected with the Khmer-Issarak movement was the late Luang Raksa Navea, whose widow is Nai Khuang's sister. He provided financial (and possibly) other assistance for the Khmer-Issarak for reasons of expected personal profit.

25X1A [REDACTED] Comment. Luang Raksa was stabbed to death on 14 June 1946.)

11. Another Khmer-Issarak leader in Bangkok is a person known as Arun or Sarun (also reported as Azun), who is a protege of Luang Adul Aduldet Charat. Sarun is a Cambodian who is an officer in the Siamese police force. He is one of the most important Khmer-Issarak leaders. He is less opportunistic and more important than Phra Phiset [REDACTED].

25X1A [REDACTED] Comment. [REDACTED] reported Lieutenant Sarun as a Siamese-naturalized Cambodian prince who is related to Luang Adul through marriage.)

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12. The principal leader of the guerrilla bandit bands in Cambodia is a Cambodian who was formerly a non-commissioned officer in the French Army. He absconded about a year ago with a payroll which he was supposed to take to a certain unit and then joined the "resistants".

13. The Khmer-Issaraks are now well-armed. They have an abundance of modern weapons which are principally Japanese and include rifles, sub-machine guns, machine guns and even mortars. For the moment, the situation in Cambodia is quiet and there have recently been no serious attacks by the Khmer-Issaraks [REDACTED]. The reason for this lull is that the Issaraks are preparing for something "big".

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14. Although Nai Khuang is staying aloof from the Khmer-Issarak movement, he is very much interested in everything that transpires in connection with it and has an intelligence network in the country to keep him advised. This network is operated by Nai Khuang's son-in-law, Nai Prayul Abhaiwong, who is a Siamese customs official at Aranya Prateh.

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[REDACTED] dated May 1947, stated that Nai Prayul seemed to be the Free Cambodian leader at that time, since Phra Phiset had fallen into disrepute.)

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